

DEC 30 2002

THE BAPTIST

Record

JOURNAL OF THE MISSISSIPPI BAPTIST CONVENTION

Youth Evang. Conf. set for Dec. 30-31

By William H. Perkins Jr.
Editor

The 2002 Mississippi Baptist Youth Evangelism Conference (YEC), scheduled for December 30-31 on the campus of Mississippi College (MC) and at First Church in Clinton, will feature an evangelist and chaplain known across the country for his extensive ministries to college and professional sports teams.

Ken Smith of Leesburg, Fla., has served as team chaplain for the football programs at Mississippi State University, Florida State University, and the University of South Carolina. He continues to provide motivational conferences and Christian programs for college and pro teams.

Smith has preached at a number of Mississippi Baptist churches over the years, as well as at the Mississippi Baptist Evangelism Conference.

Also appearing at the 2002 YEC are:

- Landon Dowden, a contemporary youth evangelist from River Ridge, La., who is working toward a doctoral degree at New Orleans Seminary. He will also be a featured speaker at Centrifuge camps in the summer of 2003.

- Adam Robinson, a youth evangelist from Birmingham. He is a popular speaker at youth conferences and youth nights around the Southern Baptist Convention, and has worked extensively with the Centrifuge and Student Life programs.

- Michael John Clement of Alabaster, Al., a popular Christian vocalist and veteran of Mississippi Baptist Youth Night. His worship CDs include *You Are Good* (1999), *Rapid Content* (2000), *Embrace This Place* (2000), and *Red* (2001).

YEC Chairman Don Lum, a consultant in the Sunday School Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB), said the annual YEC gathering is an event that God continues to use in a relevant and contemporary way to draw young people to Him.

"They're going to have fun, too," Lum added.

Organizers are anticipating about 2,300 participants from across Mississippi, and possibly more than the record 2,500 participants achieved several years ago.

"If churches haven't made plans for their young people during the

holidays, YEC is still open. If your church's teens need a spiritual boost to begin the new year, this is the place to be," Lum said.

Registration will begin at 12 noon on December 30 in A.E. Wood Coliseum on the Clinton campus of MC. Youth leaders and counselors will meet at 1:15 p.m. in Swor Auditorium on the MC campus.

The afternoon session on December 30 will begin at 2 p.m. and close at 4 p.m. The December 30 evening session will begin at 6:30 p.m. and end at 10 p.m.

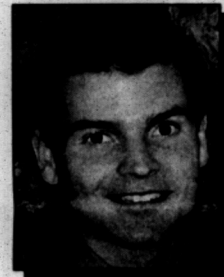
The December 31 morning session will begin with a 7:15-8:30 a.m. breakfast in the MC Student Center, for all pre-registered participants. The breakfast is compliments of MC.

The December 31 morning session will begin at 8:45 a.m. and end at 11 a.m. The December 31 afternoon session will begin at 1:15 p.m., and the conference will adjourn at 3:30 p.m.

Registration fee is \$12 at the door, and includes the MC complimentary breakfast.



Robinson



Dowden

Participants are responsible for all other meals and for overnight lodging.

"The YEC Planning Committee wishes to thank MC and First Church, Clinton, for their willingness to allow us to use their facilities, as well as for the many other ways they help make this event a success year after year," Lum said.

In addition to Lum, the 2002 YEC Planning Committee includes:

- Jay Albritton, youth minister at First Church, Vicksburg.

- Christy Anderson, minister of youth and childhood education at First Church, McComb.

- Todd Cole, minister of youth and recreation at First Church, Terry.

- Jay Fletcher, youth minister at First Church, Clinton.

- Clinton White, associate pastor and minister of youth at Bayou View Church, Gulfport.

- Patsy Bozeman, ministry assistant in the MBCB Evangelism Department.

For more information on YEC, contact Lum at P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. Telephone: (601) 292-3280 or toll-free outside Jackson (800) 748-1651, ext. 280. E-mail: dlum@mbcb.org



Clement

New survey: even non-Christians recognize Christmas in some way

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) — Non-Christians, it seems, are okay with Christmas. Nearly half of adult Americans report they personally know someone who doesn't believe in God but will celebrate Christmas this year anyway, according to a recent study by Scripps Howard News Service and Ohio University.

"Historically, it has been a struggle for America to find meaningful holidays that include a sufficiently broad number of people, but Christmas seems to have many modes of interpretation upon which we can set our own personal needs," University of Texas historian Penne Restad, author of *Christmas in America: A History*, said in a Dec. 9 Scripps Howard report.

"Christmas has become as much a celebration of community as it has a celebration of religion," she pointed out.

The true meaning of Christmas, however, is rooted in Jesus, noted James T. Draper Jr., president of LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention. "Christmas is about God breaking into the arena of human life," Draper noted in an e-mail devotional. "He pitches his tent with us. He walks with us. He is with us wherever we go and whatever we do."

The Scripps Howard/Ohio University survey of 1,001 people conducted in October found that more people will set up a Christmas tree than will attend a worship service on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. Americans also overwhelmingly believe Christmas has become less focused on the birth of Jesus than it used to be, the report said.

"As a free thinker, I believe the holidays are a great tradition regardless of the underlying basis for them," Ron Barrier, a New York leader of American Atheists, a 2,500-member national organization defending the rights and interests of atheists, said in the report.

Atheists like Barrier are likely to enjoy celebrating holidays such as Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, and even the winter solstice.

The survey also found that younger people and people living on the West Coast are more likely to know others who are atheists but will celebrate Christmas anyway.

Draper, meanwhile, exhorted fellow believers, "Do you know someone who is hurting during this Christmas season? Reach out with the love of Christ. Give the gift of hope that is only possible through a relationship with the Savior who came to earth at Christmas."

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CHRISTMAS AT GROUND ZERO — Workers decorate a Christmas tree at ground zero in New York in memory of the city's public safety heroes who lost their lives Sept. 11. (Photo courtesy of Tony Cartledge)

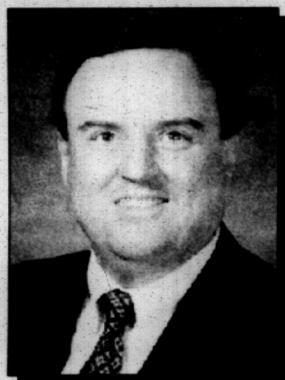
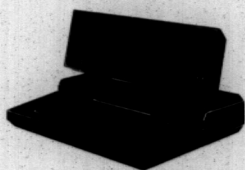
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Good for evil, victory from defeat

We've all heard the axiom, "What Satan intended for evil, God used for good." Maybe it has been applied poorly at a particularly inappropriate time for some of us — the unexpected loss of a loved one, for example — but it is nonetheless true.

Those thoughts came to mind upon reading of the tragic death of Baptist nurse Bonnie Witherall, a missionary appointed to Sidon, Lebanon, by the Christian and Missionary Alliance of Colorado Springs. On November 21, she was shot three times in the head after answering the door at the medical clinic where she worked.

What could be worse than the death of a dedicated Christian missionary, willing to risk her very life to take the Gospel to a lost and dying world? What further crushing punishment could the Evil One possibly be plotting for us? What could be a greater discouragement?

Yet, God has managed to turn evil into good, tragedy into triumph. Satan has once again seen victory snatched from his jaws.

"The other week, I sat as two leaders in the evangelical community asked one another for forgiveness for not working together, and then they pledged to work together," reported a Southern Baptist representative in the Sidon area who spoke with Baptist Press but cannot be identified for security reasons.

"During the past couple of days, we have been overwhelmed as local believers and missionaries have expressed interest in what we are doing," he added.

Witherall's death also led to the first community-wide prayer meeting of believers in the Sidon area, the representative said. "We are seeing more interest in the work here than we have in a long time.

"Daily, we are receiving e-mail from people all over the world asking how they can pray and be a part of what God is doing here. We stand ready with an answer."

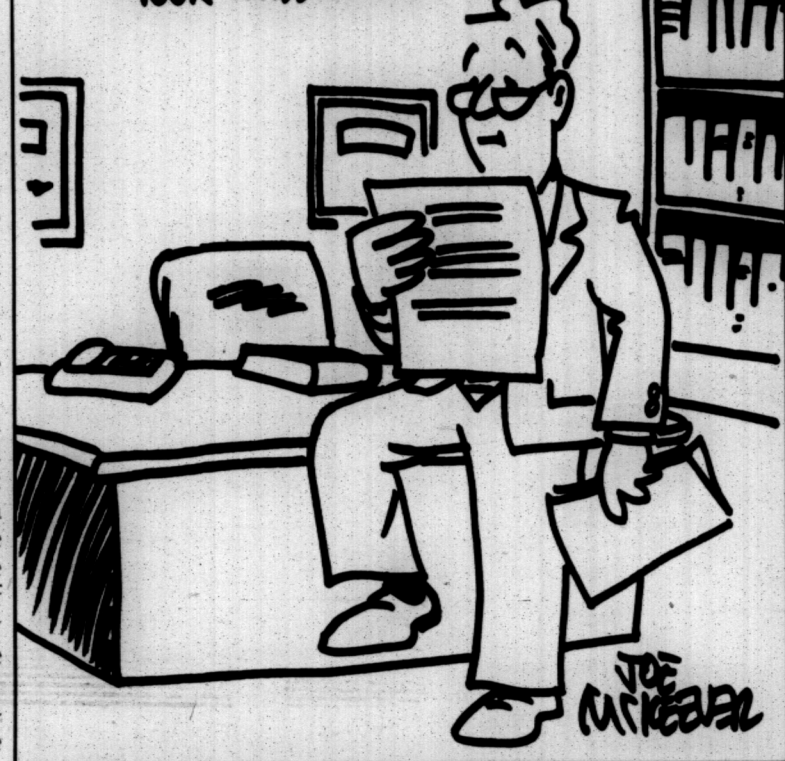
As if to magnify the newfound boldness of the believers in Sidon, the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention announced in recent days the formal renewal of an old friendship with Lebanese Baptists that began with the arrival of the first Southern Baptists in 1921. The new union was finalized about a month before Witherall's death.

Southern Baptists and Lebanese Baptists pledged to work toward three goals: that every person in Lebanon should hear the Gospel, that every home should have a copy of God's Word, and that every neighborhood should have its own church.

"Today, the Baptist community joins again the hands of its mother church, enjoying the richness, the mercy, and the goodness of its eternal Father," said a Lebanese Baptist official.

That "mother church" would be us — Southern Baptists — and you can be assured that Lebanon is not the only place in the world where a small, struggling community of believers looks to us for help in achieving victory against all odds.

**"DEAR PASTOR—
REMINDE THE CONGREGATION
THAT WE NEED THEIR
PRAYER SUPPORT.
—YOUR MISSIONARY"**



Like Bonnie Witherall, Southern Baptists have missionaries who are willing to answer the call to these areas at the risk of their lives. They depend on us for prayer support and financial support. Without our commitment to both, we will have failed and evil will prevail after all.

May that never, ever be said of Mississippi Baptists.

The year was 1989. I was sitting in the Sunday morning worship service at Grace Baptist Church in Zwedru, Liberia, West Africa. Grace was the mother church of the 19 village churches recently started in Grand Gedeh County.

John and Joetta Collins were one of the strong families in the church. Their spiritual growth was one of our greatest joys.

Two of the Collins children, Vashti and Junior, were home for the weekend from the capital city of Monrovia, where they attended the university. They were to provide the special music for the worship service, and we looked forward to that blessing.

Vashti announced that they would be singing Blessed Redeemer. Their voices blended beautifully, as always, when they began the first verse. As they began the second verse, it was as if a dam of love and emotions suddenly burst from Vashti. Her voice broke and tears began to stream down her face. Through her tears and brokenness, she sang with Junior:

*Father, forgive them, thus did
He pray,
E'en while His life blood flowed
fast away;
Praying for sinners while in
such woe,
No one but Jesus ever loved so.*

GUEST OPINION:



The Lord of Comfort and Hope

*By Margaret Fairburn, member
Lexie Church, Walthall Association*

With my fellow church members that morning, I felt the depth and wonder of Jesus' love and worshipped Him as my heart was washed through my own tears of brokenness.

I could not have dreamed that, two years later, three of the Collins' grandchildren would be singing that same special music for the first worship service in our refugee church in Toulepleu, Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast).

The Collins and their younger children had joined thousands of Liberians who fled for their lives during the war in Monrovia. They suffered the loss of all things, but the Collins family provided the nucleus of the little refugee church in Toulepleu.

Blehsade, Jojo, and Othello Collins comprised the trio for special music that morning as I waited to bring the message. My heart was deeply moved as

Jojo began to weep on the second verse, the same words that had broken Vashti two years earlier. No doubt Jojo was remembering Vashti and Junior, and wondering when he would see them again.

I wept as I too experienced those emotions, but I thanked God that Jojo and others there had the comfort and hope of Jesus in their hearts. Through them, others would also experience that hope.

Repeatedly as we found our Baptist refugees scattered in the villages along the border, my missionary co-worker Rachel DuBard and I reminded them, "We know you have lost everything and are dependent on relief agencies for food and shelter, but you have not lost Jesus. We will start churches and share our Jesus with fellow refugees. God will bless us."

Soon we were teaching and

baptizing new converts, and small mud stick church buildings were standing.

Southern Baptists are reaching out to many parts of our world to multitudes who are suffering the loss of all things, with nothing in their hearts to give hope and peace.

Our missionaries are in these places to share the message of the only One who can bring comfort and the hope of eternal life.

It behooves us to make our churches the lifeline channel to support them through our prayers, our volunteer service, and sacrificial giving.

Here in the middle of the emphasis for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions, let us be burdened to give more liberally than ever before by setting higher goals and exceeding those goals.

Our greatest joy can come as we look outside ourselves to the people of all nations.

Fairburn is a retired International Mission Board missionary.

The Collins family was eventually reunited, but John died of a stroke shortly thereafter and a daughter passed away during childbirth. Joetta now lives in the United States with several of her children and grandchildren, but longs to return home to Liberia.

Belarus persecuting 'outlawed' religions

MINSK, Belarus (BP) — Reports of religious persecution in Belarus are surfacing in the wake of the European country's repressive new law that restricts religious activity under the Aleksandr Lukashenko regime.

Lukashenko signed the law Oct. 31, and it went into effect Nov. 16. The new law:

- bans unregistered religious activity.
- requires compulsory prior censorship for all religious literature.
- prohibits foreign citizens from leading religious organizations.
- restricts publishing and education to faiths that have 10 registered communities.
- bars all but occasional, small religious meetings in private homes.

"[Belarus] is certainly Europe's worst religious repressor, and now it has Europe's most repressive religious law," Nina Shea, director of the Center for Religious Freedom at Freedom House in Washington, told CNSNews.com.

"Belarus is the one state that has emerged from the rubble of the Soviet Union with its repressive mechanisms intact, including its KGB," Shea said. Increased persecution preceded the new law, and observers fear it will only worsen under the legislation.

In August, Lukashenko's government bulldozed a newly constructed church as parishioners were preparing for its consecration. The government claimed the church was a Christian denomination separate from the Moscow

Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church preferred by the Lukashenko regime, according to CNSNews.com.

Neighbors have complained of small groups meeting in pri-



SOVIET REMNANT — Aleksandr Lukashenko, who signed Belarus' repressive religion law, leads a regime that has been described as the worst throwback to the days of repression under the old Soviet system. (BP photo)

vate homes for worship, according to Keston News Service. The pastor of a Pentecostal church in Minsk told Keston the complaining began after the new law was adopted.

Reports also suggest that Belarusian authorities have already implemented public

opinion in deciding which religious communities should gain registration. Keston said the public opinion is usually stirred up by local Orthodox priests who lobby against non-Orthodox religions.

A Hindu couple told The New York Times that in the past four months they have been arrested twice, sent to jail for 10 days, and fined more than \$1,000. An apartment they help rent was broken into and vandalized, and the wife was severely beaten on the steps of their apartment.

Six of the couple's friends also were beaten in separate incidents, The Times reported Nov. 21. Belarusian police issued alerts that the couple and their friends are criminals when in fact they are just Hindus practicing their religion.

In 1999, the Full Gospel Pentecostal Church in Minsk had 1,000 members. After being driven from one building where it held services and being threatened to move from another, it has lost 400 worshippers. Most members stopped attending for fear of the government, The Times reported.

Further persecution includes Hindus fined for meditating, Baptists fined for singing hymns, Protestants prohibited from purchasing property, and Catholics banned from using foreign priests. Jews have suffered firebomb attacks on synagogues, and a government publishing house published a book considered to be anti-Semitic.

"Lukashenko sees any opposition, any foreign presence, as a threat to his monopoly," Wayne Merry, a senior analyst at the American Foreign Policy Institute, told the Voice of America in its Nov. 22 report. "He is a classic Soviet in that regard."

That reason may have contributed to NATO's rejection of Belarus when it welcomed seven new countries into its organization in late November, several of which were former Soviet states.

All seven nations — Slovenia, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia — were members of the former Soviet Bloc.

Among accounts of Soviet-like behavior Belarusians have witnessed within the country in recent years, a woman told the Voice of America that her husband and another man vanished from a Belarusian city with no explanation. The Lukashenko government has remained silent on the issue except to claim that she may have killed her husband.

Since Lukashenko's election in 1994, Belarus has become one of the poorest and most internationally isolated of the former Soviet Republics, VOA recounted Nov. 22. Lukashenko has crushed democracy, human rights, and religious freedom within Belarus.



MISSISSIPPI
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**THE
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In 1996, the electoral parliament was disbanded by "extra-constitutional means," as phrased by Michael Kozak, U.S. ambassador to Belarus, in the VOA report.

Lukashenko is strongly opposed to western influence, VOA added, and is believed to have ties to another anti-West dictator — Saddam Hussein.

According to VOA, visits between Belarus and Iraq have been on the rise, and evidence is mounting that military sales are increasing between the two nations.

In 1998, United Nations weapons inspectors said they found Belarusian optical machinery in Iraqi artillery factories.

Earlier this year, VOA said, the U.S. State Department accused Minsk of training Iraqi forces to use anti-aircraft systems directed at shooting down American and British aircraft patrolling no-fly zones over Iraq.

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Performances return

SEMINOLE, Fla. (BP) — It took persistence and prayer, but the 84-voice Seminole High School Gospel Choir was handed a victory Nov. 22 when the local school board issued new guidelines allowing the choir to perform at events held in churches. The award-winning choir was barred from performing at a community wide memorial service honoring the memories of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on America. "I am rejoicing," Jimmy Dale Patterson told the Florida Baptist Witness. Patterson is pastor of Central Church in Sanford, Fla., where the event was to have taken place. "God used his people to bring resolution to this injustice. Not only his people, but the prayer of his people." The Sept. 11 memorial service, one of four at Central Church, was designed to honor local elected public officials, including mayors, judges and members of the Seminole County School Board. Matt Staver, president of Orlando-based Liberty Counsel, was a featured speaker at the well-attended event, and has been working with the choir to develop guidelines for singing at "religious" events. Liberty Counsel, in a response to the action, faxed a legal opinion outlining three federal court of appeals cases that ruled school choirs may sing religious songs, and that barring the group from singing at a church was not only unconstitutional, but also "imprudent" in light of the September 11 memorial. In a Sept. 11 press release, the organization had said they were considering a federal lawsuit. The recent decision came after a Nov. 19 school board meeting, according to Staver, when a number of parents and clergy expressed support for the choir. "There were certain people within the administration who sought to ban the Gospel Choir from singing at religious events," said Staver, in the Nov. 22 release. "Persistence paid off in this case. Once the matter came to the board with broad support from the community, the issue was finally resolved. I am... thrilled by this announcement as we approach the Christmas season."

Looking back

10 years ago

The Deck, a restaurant in Columbia, and First Church, Columbia, team up to provide a distribution point for free 24-Hour Counselor tapes produced by the Baptist Sunday School Board. The tapes feature information and advice from leading Christian counselors on a variety of contemporary issues.

20 years ago

The Brotherhood of Shiloh Church, Alcorn Association, leads the entire church to help the recent flood victims in an area around Diaz, Ark. Shiloh sends a \$500 gift and delivers a truckload of furniture, food, and bedding to the stricken area.

50 years ago

Auber J. Wilds, Baptist Training Union Secretary for the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, retires after 35 years of service in that position. He is succeeded by Kermit King, an associate in the South Carolina Training Union Department.

Magazine recognizes purity among teens

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) — More teens are choosing virginity, as highlighted in a headline atop a cover story in Newsweek magazine Dec. 9.

"Visit any American high school and you'll likely find a growing number of students who... have decided to remain chaste until marriage," Newsweek says of "this wave of young adults... a new counterculture, one clearly at odds with the mainstream media and their routine use of sex to boost ratings and peddle product."

Newsweek also acknowledges "the growing abstinence movement has been 'largely fostered by cultural conservatives and evangelical Christians.'"

Since 1993, LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention has sponsored a worldwide campaign to challenge students to choose abstinence. More than a million young people have signed True Love Waits covenant cards, which state: "Believing that true love waits, I make a commitment to God, myself, my family, my friends, my future mate and my future children to be sexually abstinent from this day until the day I enter a biblical marriage relationship."

Among True Love Waits boosters is President Bush, who forwarded a letter to students at a TLW rally at Wedgwood Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, last February, stating, "Your decision to remain sexually abstinent until marriage is the right choice. Your commitment to abstinence from now until you're married demonstrates great strength, great conviction and wisdom. I encourage you to actively live out the faith and principles that led you to sign the abstinence pledge."

To back up his words, the Bush administration plans to increase federal funding for abstinence programs by nearly a third, to \$135 million in 2003.

Teenagers appear to be taking notice of the abstinence message. A recent Centers for Disease Control report noted that the number of high school students who said they've never had sexual intercourse rose by nearly 10% between 1991 and 2001.

Newsweek found some of those students and questioned them about their decisions to abstain. Some said religion had played a role in their decision, others said it hadn't.

Lenae Young, a 19-year-old college student in Atlanta, decided in high school that sexual activity was not the best option for her after she observed the behavior of so many peers who did not choose to wait.

"I feel that part of me hasn't been triggered yet," she told the magazine. "Sex is one of those things you can't miss until you have it."

Last summer, Young and her friends attended a Silver Ring Thing in Pittsburgh, a free event that combined music videos and live teen comedy sketches with messages about the dangers of premarital sex. Teens can purchase a silver ring and a Bible for \$12, and at the end of the program, they recite a pledge of abstinence and put on their rings, Newsweek said. Then they have a bonfire and dance to celebrate their decisions.

Latoya Huggins, an 18-year-old living in a rough neighborhood in New Jersey, told Newsweek that peer pressure is heavy as

young people in her world engage in sex outside marriage. But Huggins told the magazine she started thinking seriously about abstinence five years ago when a national outreach program called Free Teens began teaching classes at her church.

The True Love Waits theme for the current year, "True Love Waits Goes Home," reflects a broadened wording of the TLW commitment, stating: "Believing that true love waits, I make a commitment to God, myself, my family, my friends, my future mate, and my future children to a lifetime of purity including sexual abstinence from this day until the day I enter a biblical marriage relationship."

Meanwhile, a True Love Waits pledge for parents states: "Believing that true love is pure, I join (insert student's name) in committing to a lifestyle of purity. I make a commitment to God, myself, my family, and my community of faith to abstain from pornography, impure touching and conversations, and sex outside a biblical marriage relationship from this day forward."

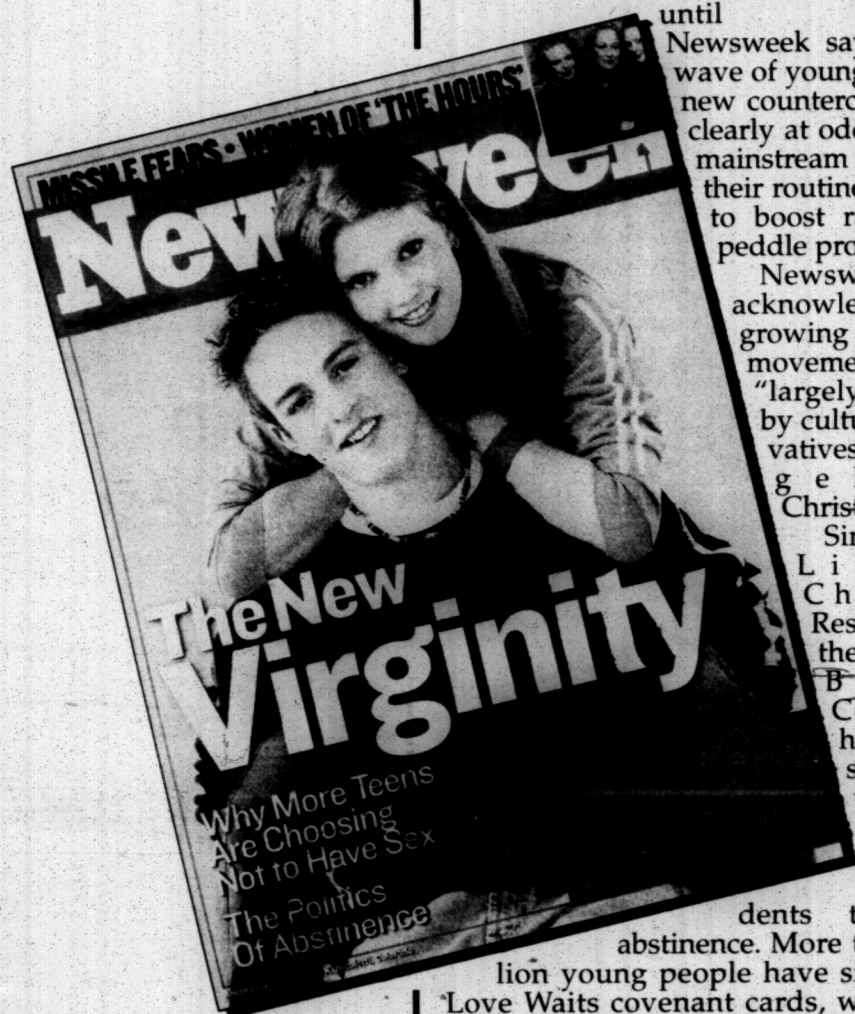
The home-oriented emphasis can help families see that purity in lifestyle goes beyond teens avoiding sex; it applies to the whole family, said Jimmy Hester, senior director in LifeWay's student ministry publishing.

In connection with the emphasis, LifeWay released a new True Love Waits Goes Home Manual in October for use by youth ministers, volunteer leaders, families and other student leaders.

Christian recording artist Rebecca St. James also is advocating the abstinence message in a new book, Wait for Me, which also was the title of one of her recent hit songs.

"In eight years of ministry, never has one of my songs evoked as much response as this one," St. James told LifeWayonline. "It has taught me we all need encouragement to be strong in purity; not just in our bodies, but in our hearts and lives as well."

To St. James, "[T]he most joyful, beautiful, exciting romance is the one that is pure."



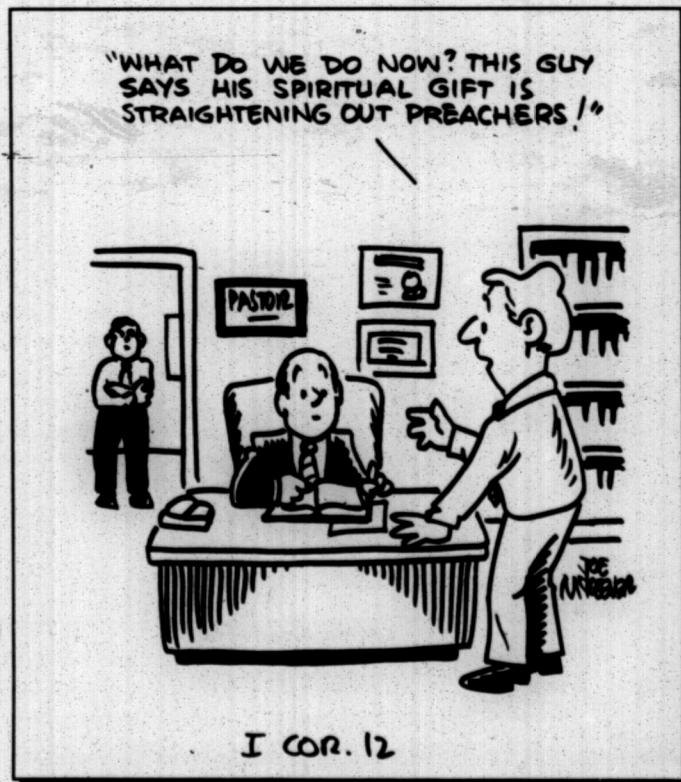
McKeever offers cartoons for January Bible Study

Joe McKeever, pastor of First Church in Kenner, La., and a former Mississippi Baptist pastor and church staffer, has released his annual January Bible Study cartoons to complement this year's

study of 1 Corinthians. McKeever, who draws editorial cartoons for state Baptist newspapers and other publications, is syndicated by Baptist Press in Nashville. There is no charge for the January Bible Study car-

toons if downloaded from www.fbckenner.org. The cartoons are also copyright-free. A two-dollar fee to cover the costs of printing and postage is required if the cartoons are ordered and mailed from First

Baptist Church, P.O. Box 1357, Kenner, LA 70063. For more information, contact McKeever at fbck1@compuserve.com, or call (504) 466-5381. Samples from the January Bible Study cartoon set are printed below.



Supremes sweep away license plate appeal

WASHINGTON (BP and local reports) — The U.S. Supreme Court has cleared the way for Louisiana to continue to sell Choose Life auto license plates, which is good news as well for supporters of Mississippi's new pro-life license plates.

The high court in early December rejected an appeal by abortion-rights advocates, thereby allowing a federal appeals court ruling in favor of the pro-life plates to stand.

A 1999 state law established the specialty plate, which features the words Choose Life and depict a baby in a blanket held in the beak of a pelican, Louisiana's state bird, according to The New Orleans Times-Picayune. After legal delays, the plate went on sale November 1, and 192 of the licenses have been sold since then, The Times-Picayune reported.

Six other states — Alabama, Florida, Hawaii, Mississippi,

Oklahoma, and South Carolina — have approved similar pro-life plates, according to the newspaper. Mississippi's special Choose Life plates went on sale earlier this year.

Louisiana's Choose Life plate costs \$61.50 for two years, in addition to the normal license fee, the newspaper reported. From this cost, \$25 will go each year to the state for distribution to organizations that offer abortion alternatives, such as adoption agencies and crisis pregnancy centers, according to the report.

Lee Yancey, consultant for the Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission, said the Mississippi Choose Life license plates cost \$30 more than regular license plates, and \$24 of that fee goes to the Choose Life Advisory Committee, which determines how the money will be distributed to the state's crisis preg-

nancy centers. Yancey is a member of the committee.

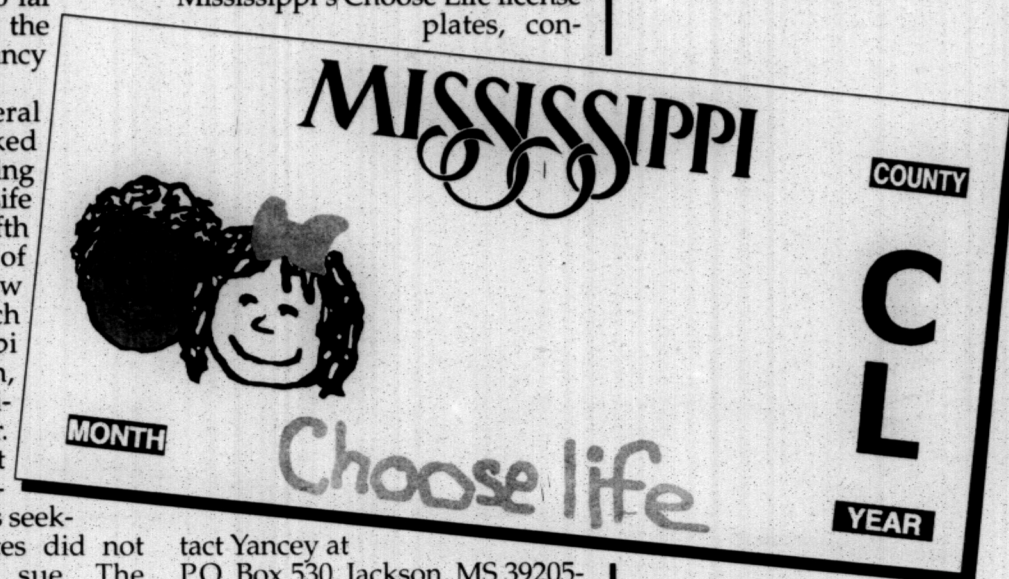
The Mississippi Choose Life license plates have so far raised \$32,040 for the state's crisis pregnancy centers, Yancey said.

In 2000, a federal judge blocked Louisiana from issuing that state's Choose Life plates. The U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans, which includes Mississippi in its jurisdiction, overturned that decision earlier this year. The appeals court ruled that the abortion-rights advocates seeking to bar the plates did not have standing to sue, The Times-Picayune reported.

Although pro-abortion groups in Mississippi complained loudly about legislators' approval of the

special license plates, no lawsuits have yet been filed.

For more information on Mississippi's Choose Life license plates, con-



tact Yancey at P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. Telephone: (601) 292-3331, or toll-free outside Jackson (800) 748-1651, ext. 331. E-mail: lyancey@mbcb.org.

THE GIFT THAT LASTS!

Christmas gifts, whether for the children or for adults, do not seem to last very long. Toys for the kids are anxiously unwrapped, unboxed, played with, and often within a few hours, are discarded as ancient memories. For adults, the gift may be a little more practical, or at least more durable, and be used throughout the year, or the hunting season, or the meal preparations. Still, in time, they not only lose their luster, they are sometimes not even used at all.

For those who may have purchased or received some piece of exercise equipment, all you need do is look around and see how the last piece of exercise equipment is being used and you will realize where the new one is probably headed. More often than not, if it has not been pushed off into a storage area or garage, it has become nothing more than another clothes hanger.

Christmas and the Christmas gift is much more than that — it is the gift that lasts! In fact, it is the gift that lasts forever. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." So, how is it that God's heavenly gift of abundant, eternal, and enormous life in His Son, could so quickly have been forgotten — crumpled up, like a piece of wrapping paper and thrown aside so easily and so thoughtlessly after the holidays? Can we not cherish, enjoy, and live with this gift every day? I believe we can. How? By keeping in us, before us, and letting flow through us what Jesus brings to our lives.

Let me mention just four things that Christmas is:

• **Upside-downness.** Christmas is a great time for you and me to re-evaluate life



Directions

Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

and its generally accepted emphasis. The priority of power, prestige, and the significance of things and material value, all seem to get turned upside-down by the true Christmas. Even in the midst of a materialistic age, somehow we are forced to realize that true peace is not brought about by any of those things that we shift and swap, but in the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

We can see this by looking in the Christmas story from Luke 2. There we find a list of characters, as the story is told, and it seems as though Luke arranges them from the greatest to the most insignificant — at least in the world's eyes. Just look at the list: Caesar Augustus, a ruler; Quirinius, a governor; Joseph, a Jewish man; Mary, a woman who would not have any worth or value except in relationship to her husband; and then a baby. A baby who would be born in the least inviting circumstances, in a desolate place, and in a cattle stall.

Yet, now the whole order of importance is reversed as we recognize the baby as the most significant person in the story and Mary, His mother, with great value in the Kingdom of God and standing in the community of faith. And Joseph, a good and devout man, is better known than the governor of the area or even the world ruler, Caesar Augustus. The whole string of characters is turned upside-down.

Christmas is like that and Christmas, every day, entails

some of those kinds of experiences — where the things of true wealth and worth are always kept at the forefront and the things of temporal, passing enjoyment, are kept in their proper place.

• **Newness.** Christmas is a time of newness. We celebrate the coming of Jesus in the dead of winter when the grass is brown, the trees are bare, the skies are gray, and the winds are cold. In the midst of all that, the atmosphere is filled with song, expectation, and joy. It springs from God's wonderful intrusion into our lives. In Revelation, when the Bible says that God makes all things new, it is true! At Christmas, He reminds us that He is the God of ongoing, wonderful renewal.

• **Thoughtfulness.** I suppose one thing that we see more often than any other aspect of Christmas, other than the store ads, is the thoughtfulness that people have one for another. Just this Christmas season I have both seen and experienced the thoughtfulness and kindness that people express for each other. I felt it the other night from a man. We were both making a late night run to the grocery store and as we stepped up to the checkout counter at the same time, we both said, "You go ahead." "No, you go ahead." "No, you." Of course, in the time that we spent trying to get each other to check out first, we both probably could have checked out. Yet, the thoughtfulness of that guy, who didn't know me and I didn't know

him, became a point of delight late in the evening.

I also saw it on the road. In the hustle and bustle of Christmas shopping traffic, a sweet, older lady was trying to get through the traffic and across two lanes. All of the traffic stopped and waved her on through so she could get on her way. Thoughtfulness! It is amazing how it seems to surface around the time of God's thoughtfulness towards us in Christ. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we kept it up through the year?

• **Awareness.** There is something about Christmas that raises our awareness of the Lord, our need for Him in our lives, and the needs of others around us. Jesus always had His sensors in tune with all of the needs around Him — the poor, impoverished, overlooked people of His day, as well as the empowered, arrogant, and ill-spirited. Jesus was aware of the central, basic need in their life of a relationship with God.

Jesus was and wants us to be aware of the people who are around us and with whom we come in contact — aware of their needs and hurts. Jesus saw them and He saw what could be. It was an unaltered reality in His life upon which He continued to move forward in the Father's will. Each day was an awareness of the unfolding plan of God for who He was and who He would become. His first spoken, recorded words were, "I must be about my father's business." Never a day did Jesus deviate from being aware of living out the purpose and plan of His Father. That's Christmas! That's what we can take, not just into a season, but into the days that are before us.

God bless you and have a Merry, Merry Christmas all year long!

Christian band turns down movie role

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) — The Elms, a Christian rock band, has turned down an opportunity for high-profile exposure in an edgy teen movie because of the film's controversial content.

The young Canadian band members were tapped to appear in a film starring teen pop singer Mandy Moore and Macaulay Culkin, but when the band read the script, they decided not to participate.

The movie, entitled *Saved*, essentially pokes fun at born-again Christians. Set in a Christian high school, the film is about a girl named Mary who becomes pregnant after sleeping with her homosexual boyfriend in an unsuccessful attempt to make him straight, according to canadianchristian.com. Mary is then ostracized by most of her classmates while her mother has a secret adulterous affair with the school's pastor.

"The film, in our estimation, wasn't just work that approached life from a different standpoint than ours. To participate in 'Saved' would've been asking us to condone and support things we're wholeheartedly against. We're not ready to forfeit our loyalty to those things," said band member Owen Thomas.

The Elms recently finished a tour with the popular Christian band Jars of Clay and released their second album, *Truth, Soul, Rock & Roll*, in October.

BAPTIST COLLEGE NEWS

The William Carey College Theatre and School of Music



Tolleson, Morton, Mabry, McGriggs, Royce, & Eduardo

Mississippi College (MC), Clinton, selected 75 students for inclusion in the 2003 edition of Who's Who Among Students In American Colleges and Universities, a publication that is reserved for outstanding campus leaders. Lee Royce, President of Mississippi College, presented the honorees with certificates during a special program in Anderson Hall, B.C. Rogers, on Dec. 3.

Mississippi College (MC), Clinton, will hold the December 2002 graduation commencement ceremonies on Dec. 20 at 7:00 p.m. in A. E. Wood Coliseum, MC. Degrees will be conferred by Lee G. Royce, President of Mississippi College. The

Commencement Address will be delivered by Gerald Lee, professor of economics and director of the MBA program in the MC School of Business. Lee was named the 2001-02 Distinguished Professor of the Year.

BellSouth established the BellSouth Endowed Scholarship Fund at Mississippi College (MC), Clinton, in November of 2001. MC is grateful to BellSouth for their sponsorship of the annual Scholarship Dinner held each fall. Pictured (from left) are Patsy Tolleson, BellSouth Director of External Affairs; William Morton, Lori Mabry, and Tameka McGriggs, scholarship recipients; Lee Royce,

President of Mississippi College; and Marcelo Eduardo, Dean of the School of Business.

The Mississippi College, Clinton, Alumni Association is sponsoring its first transatlantic tour, European Splendor, May 15-25, 2003. Alumni, faculty and staff, and friends of MC are invited to participate in this scenic and historic tour. Lance Clay, Director of Alumni Affairs, and Dr. and Mrs. Edward McMillan, Professor of History and Political Science, will co-direct the tour. A detailed brochure is available from the Alumni Office, (601) 925-3208, clay@mc.edu, or from Edward McMillan (601) 925-3497, emamilla@mc.edu.

Pollard biography available

JACKSON, Ms. (Special) — A newly-published biography of Frank Pollard, retired pastor of First Church, Jackson, is now available to the public. Author Bob Pittman of Jackson said the biography tells the story of Pollard's life journey "from his days as a timid, tongue-twisted young boy in the oil fields of Texas to his recognition by Time magazine as one of the seven stars of Protestant preaching in America."

Pittman said the book, Chosen: The Mission and Message of Frank Pollard, was a year-and-a-half in the making and includes extensive interviews with Pollard, who served as pastor of First Church, Jackson, for 20 of his 47 years in the ministry.

Pollard is currently in his second term as president of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, and serves as professor of preaching at Truett Seminary at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. Pollard and his wife Jane still make their home in Jackson.

Pittman retired after leading the Mississippi Economic Council for a number of years, and he continues to publish three newspapers in the Hattiesburg area.

The 260-page, hardback biography of Pollard is available at First Church, Jackson, and at The Times of South Mississippi newspaper office in Hattiesburg. For more information, contact Pittman at The Times, P.O. Box 15, Hattiesburg, MS 39402. E-mail: thetimes@tecinfo.com.

will present How To Eat Like A Child And Other Lessons In Not Being A Grown-up! on Dec. 19 and 20 at 7 p.m. at the Saenger Theatre, Hattiesburg. Tickets can be purchased by calling (601) 318-6221 beginning Dec. 9 from 1-4 p.m.

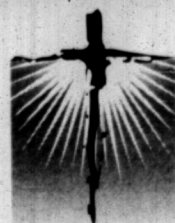
Marc Lewis, Southaven, a music education major at William Carey College, recently won the Congressional Award Gold Medal for volunteering 900 hours of his time to community service. Congressman Chip Pickering presented the award to Lewis in September.

Ronnie Cottingham will be in concert at Pine Burr Church, Columbia, on Dec. 22 at 5 p.m. For more information, call (601) 736-8524, or (601) 736-2525.

STAFF CHANGES

Rocky Creek Church, Lucedale, has called Q. T. Curtis as Interim Pastor. Curtis was pastor of Sage Avenue Church, Mobile, Ala. for 28 years. He is a graduate of Lenior-Ryne College in North Carolina and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He has also pastored Mexia Church, Mexia, Ala. and Southside Church, Monroeville, Ala.

Got news?
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MISSISSIPPI
BAPTISTS



Mississippi College 2003 Who's Who Among American College and University Students

Mississippi Baptist 2003 Christian Education Clinics



February 8 - Highland Baptist Church, Meridian
March 8 - First Baptist Church, Jackson

These clinics are for Church Weekday Education Teachers, Christian School Teachers, and home educators. Both the Mississippi State Department of Health and the Mississippi Private School Association accredit these clinics.

Pre-registration is required. Those registering early get an early bird special rate of \$14 and with the regular fee being \$16 each. Registration packets can be secured from the Discipleship and Family Ministry Department at 1-800-748-1651, or by e-mail at dhicks@mbcb.org.

NAMES IN THE NEWS

Corece Colvin recently retired after 37 years of service as church clerk at Big Level Church, Wiggins. Pictured (from left) are David Perry, pastor, and Colvin.

Calvary Church, Petal, ordained **Miller Eichelberger** into the ministry on Nov. 17. Pictured (from left) are his wife Leslie, daughter Zoe, Eichelberger, and Terrell Stringer, pastor. Eichelberger will attend New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in January.



Perry and Colvin

The North Delta Baptist Association recently presented certificates and gifts to **Ann and Hazel Overstreet** for 20 years of service in the Ministry Center. Both ladies have been on board since the beginning of the Crisis Center which serves families with clothing and emergency food. The ladies are members of Cherry Street Church, Clarksdale. Pictured (from left) are Ann and Hazel Overstreet.



Ann and Hazel Overstreet

Parkway Church, Pascagoula, recently ordained **Bud O'Brien** as a deacon. Pictured (from left) are Curtis Rinks, O'Brien, his son Barry, his wife Hazel, and Murphy Young, pastor.

First Church, Summit, participated in Judgement House Oct. 30 and 31, and Nov. 2 and 3. The script portrayed a school shooting. Twenty were saved and 30 rededicated their lives. Pictures from the event may be viewed at www.fbcsummit.org. Visit www.judgementhouse.org for information regarding Judgement House participation.



Senior Adults of Woodland Hills Church, Jackson



Curtis Rinks, Bud, Barry, & Hazel O'Brien & Murphy Young

Briar Hill Church, Florence, will have a New Year's Sing on Dec. 31 from 8-12 p.m. featuring **Testify**, **Monroe, La.**; **The Revelations**; **Gospel Echos**; and **Carolyn Norris**. For more information, call (601) 932-9337 or (601) 845-6843.



Eichelberger Family and Terrell Stringer, pastor

The Senior Adults of **Woodland Hills Church, Jackson**, went on a mission trip to Atlanta, Ga., Dec. 2-6 to work in a processing center of Samaritan's Purse: Operation Christmas Child. They inspected, sorted, and packed shoeboxes that were shipped to children overseas in over 90 countries.



YOU CAN RESPOND RIGHT NOW!

Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. *(I have sinned.)*
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. *(I repent.)*
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. *(I believe in Jesus.)*
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with him. *(I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)*

But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name (John 1:12).

If you make a decision for Jesus Christ today, contact a local Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

MS POSITIONS AVAILABLE

SEEKING TO FILL NEW POSITION: Children's Director, Immanuel Baptist Church, 6949 Hwy 61 South, Vicksburg, MS 39180, contact person: Donnie Tedford at (601) 636-0482.

THE TRI-COUNTY IS SEEKING AN Associate Associational Missions Director to assist in missions involvement and education. Resumes may be sent to Tri-County Baptist Missions, P.O. Box 350, Columbia, MS 39429. Resumes will be received until December 31, 2002.

ADATON BAPTIST CHURCH, Starkville, Miss. is seeking an individual for full-time Music Minister position. Please contact the church at (662) 323-3735 for more information. Send resume to ABC, 1975 Hwy. 82 West, Starkville, MS 39759.

JOB OPENING - NEWLY restructured position. Preschool Ministry Director; full-time position, Harrisburg Baptist Church. Salary \$25-30k; call for job description at (662) 842-6917.

CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH, Hattiesburg, Miss. is currently seeking a

bi-vocational minister of music. Please send resumes: c/o Music Search, Calvary Baptist Church, 3139 Oak Grove Road, Hattiesburg, MS 39402.

FULL-TIME YOUTH MINISTER position available at Center Hill Baptist Church, Hamilton, Mississippi. College graduate with musical background preferred. Email resume to pastorcenterhill@telepak.net or mail to: P.O. Box 59, Hamilton, MS 39746.

THE UNION BAPTIST CHURCH, 1628 W. Union Road, Picayune, Miss. is accepting resumes for Associate Pastor/Youth and Part-time or Bi-vocational Minister of Music. Send resumes to the church: attention search committee.

PELAHATCHIE BAPTIST CHURCH, Pelahatchie, Miss. seeks pianist to play for two Sunday morning services, Sunday evening evening worship service, and adult choir practice after the Sunday evening service. Contact Chris Nash, Minister of Music at (601) 825-4518 after 5:00 p.m. or leave a message on machine.

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Bill Hendricks, seminary prof, dies Dec. 8

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP) — Funeral services for William "Bill" Hendricks, age 73, a former professor at three Southern Baptist seminaries, were held Dec. 11 at Broadway Church in Fort Worth, Texas.

Hendricks died Dec. 8 in Fort Worth, where he had been director of Baptist studies and a theology lecturer at Texas Christian University's Brite Divinity School after retiring as a professor of theology from Southern Seminary in Louisville, Ky., in 1995.

Earlier, Hendricks taught at Golden Gate Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif., and at Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth. He was the author of eight books, including *The Doctrine of Man*; *Who Is Jesus Christ?*; *A Theology for Children*; and *A Theology for Aging*.

He earned an undergraduate degree from Oklahoma Baptist University, master of divinity and doctorate in theology degrees from Southwestern Seminary, and a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. He is survived by his wife Lois and a son, John.

No BR issue on Dec. 26

Due to postal regulations that limit The Baptist Record to 50 issues per year, there will be no December 26 issue. The next issue of The Baptist Record will be dated January 2, 2003.

The staff of The Baptist Record wishes for you and your loved one a joyous celebration of the birth of our Savior and a happy new year.

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'James' burial box receiving a closer look

TORONTO (BP) — Apparent differences in the handwriting in the inscription on the limestone box believed to be the most significant biblical archeological discovery since the Dead Sea Scrolls have led critics to suggest that the phrase about Jesus could have been added by a forger.

The inscription appears to be written in two different hands, the critics say. The first phrase, "James, son of Joseph," was written in a formal script while the second, "brother of Jesus," is a more free-flowing cursive style, according to The New York Times Dec. 3.

Experts discussed the validity of the inscription at a conference of biblical and archaeological researchers in Toronto. Andre Lemaire, the French specialist in Aramaic who first proposed the inscription's connection to Jesus, defended its authenticity at the conference.

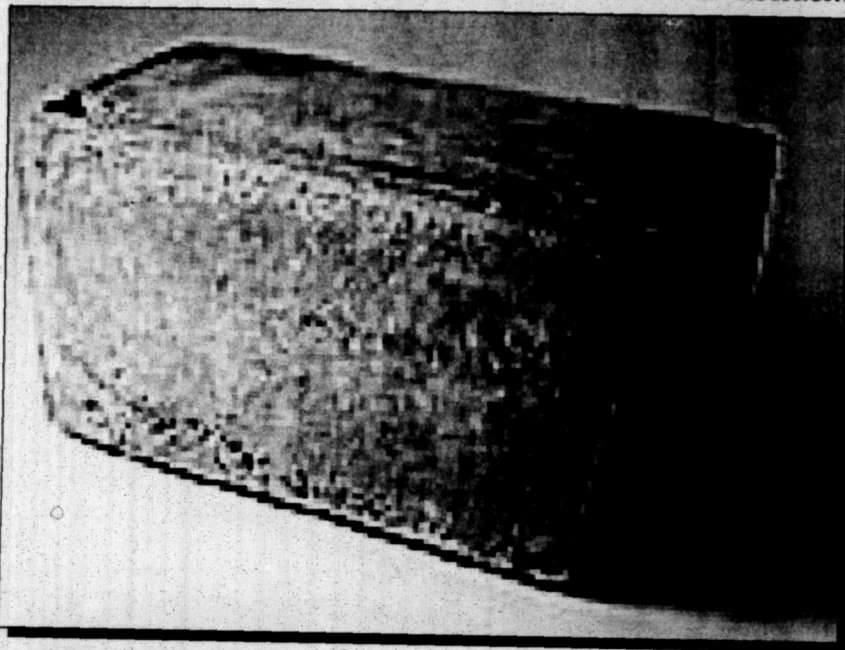
"When you look at the inscription, there are not two parts," he said. "In the second part, you also have formal script. Only two letters are cursive. ... That mixture of cursive and formal script is well-known from other inscriptions."

Some scholars have suggested that the second part of the inscription may have been added during the Byzantine period in Jerusalem when pilgrims coming to the Holy Land began seeking out objects related to Jesus so that they could venerate them, according to the Baltimore Sun Nov. 25.

However, Peter Richardson, archaeologist and professor emeritus at the University of Toronto, explained that by the Byzantine period James was almost universally referred to as "the brother of our Lord,"

not "the brother of Jesus." According to the Sun, Richardson believes the second phrase was added some-

offered his experience based on determining if a malfunction of an airplane part occurred before or after an accident.



IS IT AUTHENTIC? — Called "the first-ever archaeological discovery to corroborate biblical references to Jesus," a limestone box that may have carried the bones of James, Jesus' brother, has prompted questions about its authenticity. (BP photo courtesy of the Biblical Archaeology Review)

time between the middle of the first century and the early second century by a Christian community that knew James, as "a reinforcement of the first part of the inscription, rather than a forgery."

P. Kyle McCarter Jr., a noted Johns Hopkins University expert in ancient Near East languages, agreed.

"It is possible that someone in a community that venerated James, who had an awareness of this ossuary, perhaps even knew that it was indeed James the brother of Jesus' ossuary, simply wanted to make it explicit," McCarter said.

Daniel Eylon, an Israeli engineering professor at the University of Dayton in Ohio,

According to The Times, he examined photographs of the inscription for scratches caused by moving the box against other boxes in a cave or in the final excavation.

"The inscription would be underneath these scratches if it had been on the box at the time of

burial, but the majority of this inscription is on top of the scratches," Eylon said. "And the sharpness of some of the letters doesn't look right — sharp edges do not last 2,000 years."

Hershel Shanks, editor of Biblical Archaeology Review, the magazine that first published news of the bone box, gave two reasons the inscription is not a forgery.

"If a modern forger did it, for a couple of hundred dollars he could get a blank ossuary, and it would be a dumb forger who doesn't start from scratch so the writing is consistent," he said in an interview with The Times. "Also, you've got to assume the forger knows how to forge patina — something not known by others. All these things are possible, but extraordinarily unlikely."

The patina — the surface coating from aging and weathering — on the ossuary is consistent with estimates that the box is about 2,000 years old, according to geologists in Israel who judged the patina, The Times reported. The geologists also said they detected no signs of later tampering with the inscription.

The limestone box is scheduled to return to Israel at the conclusion of its exhibition at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto at the end of December.

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FAMILY BIBLE STUDY

Sending the Savior

Luke 2:8-20

By Shirley Stough

At the time of Jesus' birth throngs of people were in Bethlehem to register for the census. This preoccupied, milling crowd did not even notice the most important event of all history - the birth of Christ. Also today preoccupied, milling crowds seem not to notice the "reason for the season." Maybe it is time for Christians to reevaluate what Christmas means and how it should and could be celebrated.

To fulfill the prophecy of Micah 5:2 that the Messiah be born in Bethlehem, God used a pagan emperor. Octavius Caesar commanded that each head of household return to his ancestral hometown for census registration. As a descendant of David, Joseph returned to Bethlehem. Mary accompanied him. While

they were in Bethlehem, Jesus was born in a humble place with a common feeding trough for a crib. Jesus' heritage as a descendant of David, His virgin birth, and His humble beginning fulfilled prophecy recorded in Isaiah 7, 9, 11, and 53. Earthly rulers came with bravado and military might, but our Eternal Savior came as a tiny baby. The power and reign of earthly rulers has always been temporary, but Jesus' power and glory is eternal.

Prior to Jesus' birth, only a few people knew that God had set in motion His plan to send Jesus, the Messiah. When Jesus was born, only Mary and Joseph knew of the event. Luke tells us of the first public announcement, a spectacular event, to a group of lowly shepherds. An angel accompanied by a manifestation of the Lord



Stough

brought the joyful message that the Lord had gifted them and all others with a Savior. Though the shepherds were frightened at first, they realized that the message was indeed from the Lord and that the Lord had sent what they and others needed - a Savior. This message was indeed good news! The universality of this good news was emphasized by its being announced first to shepherds, social outcasts in that day, and by its being for all people, Gentiles as well as Jews.

A heavenly host suddenly appeared with the angel. They gave an appropriate response to God's gift - joyful praise. They presented the first hallelujah chorus to welcome earth's new King. We also should give praise for the peace God sent. God will give peace to those who accept the salvation He offers through Jesus. Though he was pagan, the writer Epictetus expressed the need for the type of peace that only God can give: "While the

emperor may give peace from war on land and sea, he is unable to give peace from passion, grief, and envy. He cannot give peace of heart, for which man yearns more than even for outward peace." Jesus came as our ambassador of peace and goodwill. As Christians we need to emulate His example. We need to spread goodwill by dropping our prejudices and by reaching out to others. We need to wrap our Christmas in goodwill and praise. During this Christmas season, we can praise God in different ways. We can establish family traditions of praise, sing carols, pray, study our Bible, give to missions, aid the needy, and visit the lonely.

Angels and a heavenly light were spectacular sights. It was the first time the shepherds had seen anything like the light that manifested the glory of the Lord. This miraculous sight and the joyful message had the intended effect on these shepherds. They responded as most humans would. They rushed to see the divine baby. Then they told everyone they saw

about their experience. They wanted to share the gospel. Some believed the shepherds, some were skeptical, and others were amazed. Eventually the shepherds probably returned to their jobs; however, they were changed. No one can accept Christ and remain the same. Today people respond in similar fashion. Some believe Jesus was merely a great leader. Christians, however, realize that Jesus' birth was the beginning of the miraculous salvation plan God provided. Jesus is indeed the Messiah! We need to spread that news.

Let's not be guilty of celebrating Christmas as if Christ never came. There is nothing more glorious at Christmas than praise. Let's emulate the shepherds. We can celebrate Christmas with joy and praise for God who gave us the greatest Christmas present ever. Let's keep Christ in Christmas. If Christians do not keep Christ in Christmas, how can we expect anyone else to do so?

Stough is a member of First Church, Picayune.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Christ Has Come

Luke 2:21-38

By Don Wilson

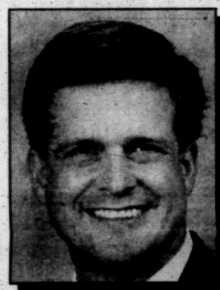
Two of the most overlooked persons involved in the Christmas story are the subjects of today's lesson in spite of the fact that they appear in the same chapter as the bulk of the information in the Gospel accounts. Christmas material can be divided into four groups: prophecies related to the coming Messiah, events occurring prior to the birth of Jesus (conception), the actual birth accounts, and the events that follow the birth. The first and only mention of Simeon and Anna in the New Testament is one of the most important after-birth events.

Jesus was eight days old. He was still tiny, not eating much, and still keeping Mary and Joseph awake at night (well, at least Mom got up, I'm sure). They were ready to leave the stable of Bethlehem where the shepherds had encountered this one who "would save them from their sins." Apparently the magi from the east had made their appearance and worshipped the newborn King (though some think the family stayed in Bethlehem until Jesus was close

to two years old). Being good Jews, Mary and Joseph had some necessary tasks to fulfill. They first had to have the baby circumcised and to give Him a name. Naming was not difficult since both Mary and Joseph had direct instructions in the birth announcement they received from the angel: "His name shall be called JESUS - Jehovah saves." The name referred to His reason for being there in the first place. Jehovah had indeed come to save His people from sin.

Circumcision was an important event, but the presentation of the offering after the days of purification (prescribed in Leviticus 12:2-8) was equally important. The required thirty-three day waiting period was over and Mary and Joseph were on the way to Jerusalem. I wonder if they could have ever been ready for what they were about to hear this day. Two little-known people showed up that day and it was no coincidence. Each of them had a specific message to proclaim that could not be muzzled.

I. SIMEON-A MAN WITH A PROMISE (Luke 2:21-35)



Wilson

The introduction is not long, but it does give a glimpse into the heart of a man who loved God deeply. Simeon was just and devout. That simply means that he was a righteous man and devoted to his God. He was waiting for the "consolation of Israel" (verse 25). Some

contend that this refers to the actual deliverance of Israel from the tyranny of the Romans, but the blessing that comes from Simeon's mouth focuses on the salvation the coming Messiah would provide. However, Simeon was so tuned in to God's plan for saving His people because of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit upon Him. It was the Holy Spirit who had revealed to Simeon that he would not die until he had seen "the Lord's Christ" (verse 26). What an awesome revelation! Just think about it. This man was living every day as if it would be the day he bumped into Messiah. He must have closely examined the face of everyone he met on the street in search of the One who would save him from his sin.

The Holy Spirit was upon Simeon, but He also was leading him. He came "by the Spirit" (verse 27) into the temple. I am sure that many of Simeon's days were spent there in the temple. He had watched sacrifices offered before. He had seen people come and go before, but this

day something (really someone) was driving him there. He could not explain it, but for some reason he was compelled to get to the temple. Driven by this sense of urgency, Simeon hurriedly made his way through the streets to the temple. Then he saw Him. Instantly he knew it. He wasn't sure if He would be an old, middle-aged, or young man, but when he saw this Baby, He knew who He was. Imagine the cold chills that jiggle his spine as he touches, then holds the Savior of the world, and listen to the baby's name - Jesus. Wow! God Himself could not have picked a more appropriate name because He did indeed come to save His people from their sins. In awe Simeon holds this baby, unable to speak, and then suddenly, almost miraculously, speaks. All activity stopped. Everyone listened as this unknown man spoke. His blessing was about the peace that Simeon himself had because the promise that the Spirit had made was now fulfilled before His very eyes. His message was about a prepared salvation. The plan was no new concoction from the mind of God. It was His plan of the ages. At the right time God would bring salvation to man apart from works. Now God's plan began to unfold as Messiah had finally arrived.

His blessing was about God's great Light that had entered the world to illuminate God's way of salvation.

II. ANNA-A WOMAN OF GRATITUDE (Luke 2:36-38)

An aged woman arrived and listened to Simeon's blessing. She had been married for seven years before her husband died and had lived eighty-four years since. Ninety-one years had passed since she married. She never left the temple, but fasted and prayed night and day. Simeon was right. She knew it instantly. This was Messiah. God had sent the Savior. So thanks erupted from her lips. She could restrain it no more. Then Anna, too, proclaimed Jesus to those who were looking for redemption. This baby was the way that God was providing hope and peace to a world that is more concerned about stuff than it is about spiritual things.

Two individuals. Two genders. Two generations. Two sinners. One unique thread held them together. He was a tiny baby. His name is Jesus and He came to save people from their sin. He is "a child destined for the rise and fall of many in Israel and a sign which will be spoken against" (verse 34). Without Him men have no hope and no peace in their hearts. But He has come! Messiah has come!

Wilson is pastor of Pleasant Ridge Church, Dumas.

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FAMILY BIBLE STUDY

Leading to Worship

Matthew 2:1-12

By Shirley Stough

In many churches a source of controversy evolves around the style of worship. Some prefer a traditional style while others find a contemporary style more worshipful. What we learn from the Bible about worship focuses on the right way to worship, not on style. Our attitude toward God is the key to meaningful worship. Matthew's account of the Wise Men's visit to worship the Christ child point out several characteristics of true worship.

The Wise Men were educated Gentiles who were experts in natural sciences, especially astronomy and/or astrology. At this time historians wrote that a king would come out of Israel. When the Wise Men saw the unusual star, they followed it, believing it to be a sign of the new king's birth. Although they had a pagan

background and did not know the significance of this new king, their motivation to worship him was sincere. They wanted to acknowledge the worth and value of this king. The distance that they had to travel from Persia to Jerusalem and the effort that they expended to locate Him did not matter. Their efforts were surely blessed because Christ always makes Himself known to those who sincerely seek Him. Seeking an opportunity to worship is an important trait of true worship. It is ironic that pagans expended so much effort to worship Jesus while so many Christians use any excuse to miss a worship service.

Since the Wise Men were looking for a baby born to be King of the Jews, the logical place to find him would be Jerusalem. They went to see Herod, the appointed



Stough

king of the Jews. Herod knew nothing about the birth of this baby nor about the prophecy of the baby. Herod's scribes and priests told him of the prophecies concerning the promised Messiah. Prophecy pointed to Bethlehem as the birthplace. A paranoid, wicked man, Herod would suffer no threat to his throne. Therefore, he cleverly planned a deceptive solution. He asked the Wise Men to go to Bethlehem and inform him when they found this child so that he could worship him. Herod's real motive was to murder the child, thus removing a rival to his position. Herod is an example of those who reject Jesus by setting selfish priorities. They are hypocritical and attend worship services to impress others or to enhance careers or reputations. The scribes and priests who told Herod about the prophecies represent people who know the scriptures but make no effort to worship Jesus. Their motivation to attend church services may

have become a sense of duty. Christians need to avoid pretense in worship. Meaningful worship must be sincere worship.

When the Wise Men left Herod, the star suddenly reappeared and began to move. They followed it to the house where it stopped. The Wise Men were overjoyed. We should feel this same emotion when we worship. Joy should be a part of all our worship experiences because it is a characteristic of sincere worship. The Wise Men had found the child. No obstacle had kept them from their goal — to worship the new king. When they saw the child, they bowed and worshiped him. Their action indicated their recognition of his deity. To bow the knee is to show reverent devotion. Such reverent devotion is an important characteristic of sincere worship.

Filled with devotion, the Wise Men offered gifts to the Holy Child. The gifts they offered were regal gifts — gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The gifts of precious, valuable metal, fragrant spice, and sweet perfume were appropriate to show devo-

tion. Appropriate giving is an important characteristic of true worship. When we love, we give. At this time of year we can give a contribution to the Lottie Moon Christmas offering. What better way to show devotion to Christ than through a gift that fulfills the Great Commission.

In a dream God warned the Wise Men not to return to Herod with information about the Christ Child. They took a risk in disobeying the ruthless Herod, but they were sensitive and obedient to God's leadership and went home by another route. Sensitivity and obedience to God are characteristics of sincere worship.

As we end 2002, why not consider how we can be more faithful in worship and service to God during 2003? We would do well to follow the example of the Wise Men who let no obstacle keep them from sincere worship of the Messiah. They joyfully and reverently expressed their devotion and obedience.

Stough is a member of First Church, Picayune.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

A Faithful Life

John 15:18-25; 16:1-4

By Don Wilson

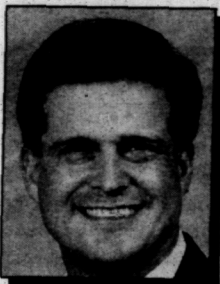
Less than ten years ago an American journalist interviewed some children from a Sunday School in Sudan. Many of the family members of these children had been killed when Arab Muslims raided their village and slaughtered Christians. The interviewer asked the children if they would turn to Islam or would they be willing to die for Christ? Their response was: "We will remain Christians because this is the truth." (from Jesus Freaks). Jesus spoke to His disciples about suffering and persecution as if it would be reality for them. They endured and were faithful. Our times have changed, but Christians still suffer in our world. Jesus' words still apply.

I. HATED BECAUSE OF WHERE YOU ARE (John 15:18-19a)

One would think that the message that Jesus had proclaimed about Himself and the need of people to allow Him to supernaturally bring them into relationship with God Himself would have been a message that was instantly accepted and never opposed. Yet the words of Jesus were constantly under attack and they still are.

First, the world is hostile because of where you are (verse 19). If believers were "of the world" the world would accept them and love them, but because they are not of the world, the world hates them. A life of commitment to Jesus is a commitment to lay the world's system down and follow God's way of thinking.

II. HATED BECAUSE OF WHOSE YOU ARE (John 15:19b-20)



Wilson

A second reason that the world hates those who follow Jesus is because of whose you are. The reason these followers are not of the world is because Jesus actually chose them out of the world. He snatched them up out of the middle of a world hostile toward Him. They were once part of it, but now want nothing to do with it. The hostility of the godless world in which we live is one proof that we are not of the world and belong to Christ.

Servants can be no greater than the masters they serve (verse 20). Jesus applied it to this theme of hostility. The world has persecuted Him, so you can expect it to persecute you. Followers of Jesus have a Master-servant relationship with Him that will inevitably lead to suffering.

III. HATED BECAUSE OF WHO THEY DO NOT KNOW (John 15:21)

The world hates followers of Jesus because of who they do not know. The world does not know God. The same message you have heard

before in the book of John rings out again. It is the Father who sent Jesus. It was the works God did that Jesus did. The Father sent Jesus and Jesus, in turn, fulfilled His mission.

The reason a godless world acts in hostility is evidence of their ignorance of God, but hostility is also a result of their ignorance. If Jesus had not come and spoken the world would have no sin (verse 22), but He did come; they did sin, and cannot excuse that sin. If Jesus had not come and done unique works among them, they would have had no sin (verse 24), but He did do unique works, they did sin, they did see both Jesus and God, and they did hate both of them. Their hostility toward God and those who follow Him was not a result of a lack of information, but a sinful refusal to trust the One of whom the information spoke. They heard enough and saw enough, but chose to ignore it.

The opening verses of John 16 conclude this section about persecution and actually tell

the reason Jesus felt it necessary to bring up the subject.

First, He recognized that many might stumble when faced with harsh hostility (verse 1). Putting them out of the synagogue was a means of excommunicating Jews who followed Christ. It was done as early as John 9, but would become an everyday occurrence later. You need to be prepared for that kind of hostility against you or, when it comes, you will stumble.

Second, Jesus knew that these followers would need something to jog their memory when times of persecution became reality (verse 4). These words about persecution would continue reverberating in their ears and ours, so that when it comes we will remember our union with Him in suffering and will prove to a watching world where we are (in another world), whose we are (Jesus chose us out of this world), and who we know (The Father and Jesus).

Wilson is pastor of Pleasant Ridge Church, Dumas.

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The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

News submitted for publication in The Baptist Record must be either (a) typewritten, (b) neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper, or (c) neatly printed on standardized forms provided by the newspaper. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone.

News may be submitted electronically to the address below, and must be contained in the message segment of an e-mail form. Due to increasing virus threats, no text



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Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and phone number.

Photographs may be color or black and white. Instant photos and digital printouts are not reproducible. Digital photos may be used if submitted as a JPEG file via either (a) e-mail, (b) three-and-a-half inch floppy disk, or (c) CD. Photos must be clear, sharp, and well-lighted.

All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date.

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Gifts of Honor and Memory

A portion of **The Village View** is allocated each month to a list of Gifts of Honor and Memory. Fortenberry Many groups and individuals elect to pay tribute to **Mr. Walter Preston** others through this sensitive, meaningful, and help-**McMurchy, Jr.** ful medium. This feature is hopefully designed to Ms. Emma further honor, with taste and respect, those who are Pauline Keulegan and have been special to our special friends. George & Huel Sills

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It is comforting to know this holiday season, that our God meets us where we are and gives "perfect gifts." Because of friends like you, children at The BCV are experiencing God's perfect joy, laughter and provision. Thank you for showing God's compassion and generosity this Christmas.

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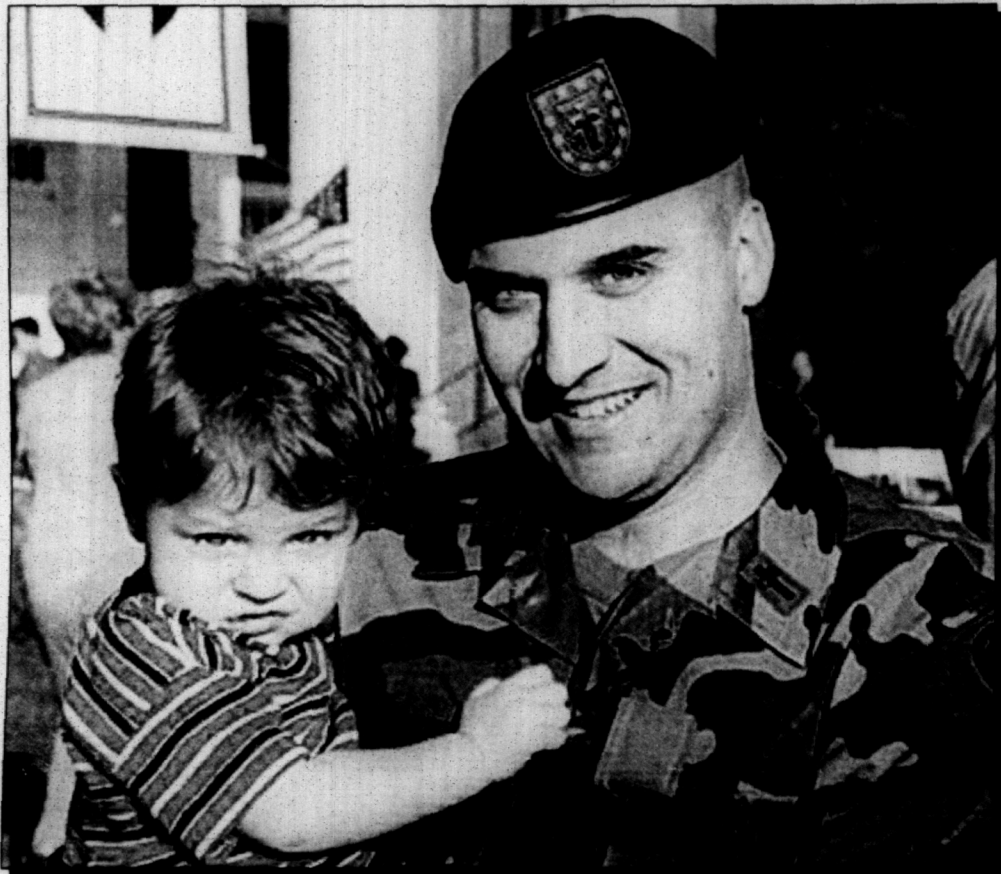
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Seminary studies interrupted by duty call

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP) — In the wake of the events of Sept. 11, Southern Seminary student Tim McKnight clearly understands early American preacher Jonathan Edwards' resolution to think often about death — but the epidemic of



CHAPLAIN DAD — Southern Seminary student Tim McKnight, seen holding one of his twin sons at a Sept. 11 memorial service, recently returned from overseas after serving 10 months as an Army National Guard chaplain. (BP photo by David Merrifield)

chaplain in both Operation Noble Eagle and Operation Enduring Freedom.

"Death is much more of a reality for me now," McKnight said. "That was probably the way in which this experience changed me most. It is one thing to talk about God's providence and sovereignty and quite another thing to have difficult situations arise and then see God's providence and grace in a time of hardship."

Hardship began immediately after the call as McKnight pondered saying goodbye to his wife, Angela, and the couple's twin sons — Noah and Micah — who were seven months old at the time. Though McKnight was not going to the front lines of the war on terrorism, he was headed for a country in which the threat of terrorism was deemed likely.

While bidding adieu to his family with danger looming wasn't easy, McKnight learned a valuable spiritual lesson during his months away: to seek his ultimate delight in the Lord. "I think the ultimate life lesson for me when I left was that I saw how secure I am in my studies and in my church home and in my family," he said.

"Leaving my family was the hardest thing I have ever done in my life, and it is only by God's grace that I was able to do it, but God challenged me to delight ultimately in him. I am not to worship the blessings but instead the one through whom all blessings flow. I think that will be a lifelong lesson," McKnight said.

McKnight's studies were interrupted by his leaving on Oct. 21, 2001. He was in Germany until Aug. 5 of this year. He has served in the National Guard as a chaplain since 1996.

McKnight's job was not to fight terrorists with man-made weapons but to provide counsel for soldiers in the midst of the introspective spiritual warring that is part and parcel of such a profoundly stressful circumstance.

As part of his job, McKnight led Bible studies and preached weekly worship services for the soldiers deployed in Hanau. While he saw a few conversions, McKnight said he was greatly encouraged by the depth of discipleship that believing soldiers often carried out toward each other.

"I would go to witness to somebody with questions about Christianity or to start a Bible study only to find out that one of my soldiers had already shared the Gospel or started a Bible study," he said.

"That's the way New Testament Christianity is supposed to work. That was a very humbling experience. My soldiers did most of the ministry."

McKnight said one of the most difficult aspects of his time overseas was not being able to share personal anxieties with another person. God eventually placed a fellow evangelical chaplain from Pennsylvania in McKnight's path from whom he received ministering.

"In that situation you can only talk to the Lord because you have to remain positive for the soldiers," he said. "That can be a lonely place. It is a real challenge for the chaplain and commander because he is in a position in which he can't share much on a personal level."

To keep thoughts of home from overwhelming him, McKnight said he took encouragement by reading John Piper, pastor of Bethlehem Church in Minneapolis, Minn., or by listening to taped sermons by Alistair Begg, pastor of Parkside Church in Cleveland, Ohio.

In addition, the wives of a number of World War II veterans from McKnight's home church sent him encouraging letters. McKnight serves as associate pastor and youth minister at Cedar Grove Church in Louisville.

"One of the things that blessed me the most was how the seminary community and our church family reached out to Angela and the boys," he said. "Church members and seminary friends babysat for her and helped us out in so many different ways."

McKnight recalls the anxious hours before his departure, during which seminary President R. Albert Mohler Jr. prayed with him in the president's office.

"That was a great encouragement to me," he said. "We are blessed to have a man like Dr. Mohler at Southern. He really ministered to me by taking time to pray with me. We are very blessed at this seminary. It's good to be back home."

Bibliocipher

By Charles Marx
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QCON QXDD JU TW
XE NCU HWDURE TOJ,
OET XE NCU TOJ
WA NCU AUOHN
WA NCU DWLT?
CWHUO EXEU: AXIU

Clue: N=T

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: John Four Thirty-Four.

terrorism that shook America on that eventful day set McKnight to pondering eternity for a reason that differs markedly from popular sentiment.

McKnight, a doctor of philosophy student at the Louisville, Ky., school, departed five weeks after the attacks for Germany as a member of the U.S. Army National Guard. He spent nearly 10 months away from family, church, and seminary while serving as a brigade

Alabama judge to continue Commandments fight

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (BP) — Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice Roy Moore has filed notice that he will appeal a federal court order declaring his monument to the Ten Commandments in the state judicial building rotunda unconstitutional, according to The Birmingham News.

"Federal district courts have no jurisdiction or authority to prohibit the acknowledgement of God that is specifically recognized in the Constitution of Alabama," Moore said in a written statement released Dec. 10. "Our constitution provides that to establish justice, we must invoke 'the favor and guidance of Almighty God.'"

Moore also noted, "For a federal court to say we cannot acknowledge God contradicts our history and our law."

The 5,300-pound monument features the King James Bible version of the Ten Commandments sitting on top of a granite block. Around the monument are quotes from historical figures and documents, such as the Declaration of Independence, but critics contend the commandments dominate.

Moore installed the monument on the night of July 31, 2001, as a film crew from Florida television evangelist D. James Kennedy's Coral Ridge Ministries documented the event.

He said he installed the monument partly because of his concern that the United States has suffered a moral decline over the past 40 or 50 years as a result of federal court rulings, including those against prayer in public schools.

U.S. District Judge Myron Thompson ruled Nov. 18 that the monument violates the First Amendment's ban on state establishment of religion and requested that Moore remove the monument within 30 days. The monument remains in the judicial building, and Thompson has scheduled a Dec. 19 hearing on whether to issue an injunction to require Moore to have it removed in 15 days.

"I think what we heard today echoed of George Wallace," Richard Cohen, an attorney for the Southern Poverty Law Center, said in response to Moore's Dec. 10 statement. "He said the federal courts have no authority to order him to do anything Alabama law doesn't require him to do. Whatever views Moore has about this, federal law is supreme."

Moore is a Baptist layman who came into the national spotlight for fighting to display the Ten Commandments in a county courthouse. He was elected Alabama chief justice in 2000.

